

[Opinion](#)
[Guest Voices](#)
[Appreciation](#)



Patricia Lefevere outside the United Nations in New York City on July 2, 1982, during a U.N. special session on disarmament (NCR file photo)



by Tom Roberts

[View Author Profile](#)
troberts@ncronline.org

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

April 5, 2023

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Patricia Scharber Lefevere, a [contributor to National Catholic Reporter](#) for more than 40 years whose stories bore datelines from around the globe, died March 30. She was 79.

The cause of death was complications from cancer treatment and congestive heart failure, according to a family member.

Born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Lefevere graduated from the Marquette University College of Journalism in Milwaukee in 1965.

Immediately following college, she worked for the Catholic Bulletin, the newspaper at the time for the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese. Two years later, according to a longtime friend, Lefevere and a colleague at the Catholic Bulletin, Dawn Gibeau, "took off to see the world. She never really stopped traveling after that."

She attended graduate school in England, where she met her husband, Andre Lefevere. They lived in Hong Kong, Belgium and Australia before ending up in Austin, Texas, where Andre was a professor at the University of Texas. The couple had one daughter, Katelijne.



Patricia Lefevere in 1975 (NCR file photo)

Patricia Lefevere worked as a business and finance reporter in Hong Kong and Belgium, but switched to religion as a specialty after reporting on the work of the

World Council of Churches in Geneva in the mid-1970s. The council and other religious organizations were attempting to resettle a quarter of a million Indo-Chinese refugees rendered homeless by the Vietnam War.

It was during that period, in 1975, that she also began writing for NCR, which put her in professional connection again with Gibeau, who had been hired by NCR and later became news editor. Gibeau died in 2006.

The life of a freelance writer can be an ill-defined and occasionally precarious undertaking, but Lefevere was among the best. While I had become familiar with the byline years earlier, when I became news editor of Religion News Service in 1984, I came to know Lefevere as a colleague. That association continued during my years at NCR.

She was an editor's dream: impressively smart with a great sense of humor, always prepared, a self-starter with boundless energy, and an engagement with the news worldwide that was remarkably detailed and nuanced. She had, as the contacts list of that era was known, a Rolodex bulging with names and numbers not only in every corner of the U.S., but in countless cities, large and small, the world over.

She was inexhaustibly and intelligently curious, deeply read across disciplines and ready, it seemed, to go anywhere on a moment's notice. I think it would not be a stretch to say that an undisputed point of joy implicit in her work was the next plane ticket to anywhere.



World traveler Patricia Lefevere, circa 2000 (NCR file photo)

In ways subtle and bold, she was fearless. I confess to using her occasionally as an example when working with young writers over the years. I would describe her as eager to talk to as many people as she could find that were connected to a story. She staunchly guarded the integrity of the reporting craft and believed stories usually have more than two sides. She just wanted to know as much as she could about everything she covered.

I was fond of saying that if I asked her to go do one more interview with the devil himself, she would without hesitation. And return with pitches for three more stories.

Tom Fox, NCR's editor/publisher emeritus who edited Lefevere in her first two decades with the paper, called her "a tenacious researcher and reporter, one of the finest who contributed to NCR."



Patricia Lefevere attends NCR's 50th anniversary celebration in Kansas City, Missouri, on October 24, 2014. (NCR photo/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

"You could aim her at any subject and be assured she would return with a well-thought-out report," said Fox. "I feel honored and most grateful to have collaborated with her over many years."

Lefevere traveled to 70 countries, reporting from 22 of them, on six continents. Domestically, she filed stories from two dozen states in her work for NCR.

Her interviewees included everyone from a Nobel laureate to a death row prisoner.

She covered top United Nations conferences for NCR, including the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1995; and the International Women's Summit in Beijing in 1995.

She won top awards from the Catholic Press Association for her interview with death row prisoner Thomas Andy Barefoot in Huntsville, Texas, on the eve of his execution in 1984 and for her cover story on the attack and destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on Sept. 11, 2001.

She did an extensive interview with Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop [Desmond Tutu](#) in 1983 during a World Council of Churches meeting in Vancouver in Western Canada.

In 2018, she [traveled to Cuba](#) with Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister, noted author and women's rights advocate, and others to take stock of what appeared to be the island's new openness to religion.

Advertisement

Her understanding of the post-Vatican II church and contemporary theologians was on full display in an [extensive appreciation](#) she wrote for NCR following the death of controversial Swiss theologian Hans Kung, based in part on dozens of conversations and interviews she had with him [over decades](#).

In 2019, Lefevere spent an academic year as a participant in the University of Notre Dame's Inspired Leadership Initiative, a program designed as "enclave education" for "accomplished" individuals. Another participant, learning of Patricia's death, sent a group email that said: "RIP Patricia ... Please send us an interview with God." One can only imagine the lengths she might go to in working on that assignment.

Her marriages to Andre Lefevere and Dr. Richard Gardner ended in divorce. Both are deceased. She was also preceded in death by her third husband, Joseph Weitekamp,

as well as her parents, Helen Murray and Clarence Scharber, and sister, Marie Elaine Scharber.

She is survived by daughter Katelijne Lefevere, son-in-law Damon Broglie, and grandsons John and George Broglie of Richardson, Texas.

A funeral Mass was held April 4 at our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Tenafly, New Jersey, where for years she was an active parishioner and member of the choir. Interment will be in Rogers, Minnesota.

A version of this story appeared in the **April 14-27, 2023** print issue under the headline: 'A tenacious researcher and reporter'.